

## Fire at the Meetinghouse Old Lehi First Ward Building 05 February 1870

The fire in the Provo Tabernacle had nothing over the fire that happened at the Lehi Meetinghouse. It was the middle of winter on a Sunday. Church was in session. John Bushman had made a hot fire in the stove of the second-story quorum room. They had an early morning prayer meeting. A lump of plaster on the wall near the stove had broken off, leaving the board exposed. The intense heat caused the partition to ignite and the fire quickly burned through the ceiling onto the shingled roof. Several boys playing outside the building which stood on the southwest corner of Second West and First South, noticed smoke curling skyward.

James Kirkham wrote in his diary that at 12:15 p.m. as “Elder I.H. Evans was speaking from the stand, D.W. Thomas came to the door of the meetinghouse and notified the people that the house was on fire” Though the warning was “don’t get excited brethren and sisters, but the meetinghouse (Lehi First Ward Building) is on fire, “pandemonium broke out. According to eyewitnesses, Men completely “lost their heads”. The kerosene lamps which lighted the hall were thrown out the windows, and men began tearing up the floor to save it from the flames. One called for an ax to chop down the pillars to allow the ignited roof to cave in. Others began tearing off the cornice.

Despite the hysteria, some did maintain their wits. John Stewart was the hero of the hour. After cutting a hole through the roof with an ax, he yelled for the men below to string out across the street eastward to form a bucket brigade. Their efforts soon emptied the well of John C. Naile. They quickly regrouped across the street to the north and emptied Israel Evan’s well before the flames were finally put out. Though the billowing smoke could be seen all over town, the fire was contained to the roof area. James Kirkham sadly noted that “more damage was done to the building by men tearing it to pieces than the fire did.” The hall was quickly rebuilt, however, and used as a meetinghouse until 1972. Lehi-Portrait of a Utah Town page 67

